day's lecture, from preparations, of which he has a very extensive collection. After lecturing from one till two he goes to the hospital, at five o'clock he returns to the demonstration, and is again ready to assist those dissecting, if any there may be. His great enthusiasm is almost invariably imparted to his junior pupils, but alas, as they become initiated into the higher walks, it is too often rubbed off, so that they appear to lose instead of improve in anatomical knowledge. Often have I been struck at his weekly concourse to find the junior make an infinitely better appearance than the senior pupil.

Let the student of medicine rest assured that nothing is wanting to make him eminent but diligence and self-reliance; no man's labour can compensate for his own indolence; opportunities are only valuable as they are embraced; let him resolutely traverse the field already before him, preparing himself withal to comprehend a wider, which, at the end, he will not fail to find stretched out before him. This correction of his own errors will be the most likely thing to infuse a salutary influence into any that may be corroding the actions of his instructors.

It would give me great pleasure to inform you what school and hospital I refer to. I am, Sir, yours truly,

GRATITUDE.

Durham, June 7, 1844.

ON THE
VALUE OF SULPHATE OF IRON AS AN ANTI-
DOTE IN POISONING BY PRUSSIC ACID.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—In the number of THE LANCET for June 29th, a very interesting paper from the pen of Sir George Lefevre appears, which contains many excellent practical rules to be followed in cases of poisoning. Our attention was particularly drawn to the antidote recommended in cases of poisoning by prussic acid, his words are—

“If there is time for anything to be done by way of prophylactic, sulphate of iron is found to be the best antidote, and we have nothing so near at hand as a bottle of ink, a teaspoonful of which may be administered.”

We were desirous to ascertain whether the sulphate of iron was, in reality, an antidote at all for this fearful poison, as if it were really not so, it would obviously be worse than useless to trust it, in so far as it would partly have the effect of drawing efforts into a wrong channel, and lead, to a certain extent, to a false security.

For this purpose, we dissolved about twenty grains of sulphate of iron, in distilled water, and added to the solution ten drops of medicinal prussic acid; no precipitate appeared, the liquid merely assumed a somewhat deeper tinge of green, and still continued to give the odour of prussic acid. We then added a solution of nitrate of silver, when an abundant grayish-white precipitate appeared, and on adding nitric acid the gray colour disappeared, but the now white precipitate was in no degree dissolved, although an exceedingly large excess of strong nitric acid was used. We had previously ascertained that both the sulphate of iron and the hydrocyanic acid used, were wholly free from hydrochloric acid, so that the precipitate could be nothing else than the cyanuret of silver. These facts prove that sulphate of iron is no antidote for prussic acid, and for a very obvious reason still less so is writing-ink entitled to such a character. Now, as sulphate of iron, so far as chemical tests go, proves to be no antidote, we are desirous to know on what grounds Sir George Lefevre rests its prophylactic character.

We have been the more readily drawn into this examination in consequence of being at present engaged in some researches on this point, the result of which, if favourable, we shall take the earliest opportunity of laying before the profession. We remain, Sir, your obedient servants,

T. and H. SMITH.

Edinburgh, July 3, 1844.

M. BEAU has never witnessed a case of spontaneous acute peritonitis in old age. When the chronic disease has been observed at this period of life, it has generally been the consequence of cancerous (not tuberculous) productions within the abdomen.

MEDICAL SOCIETIES.

ROYAL MEDICO-BOTANICAL SOCIETY.

Thursday, June 27th, 1844.

HENRY COPE, Jun., Esq., in the Chair.

A paper on digitalis was read by Dr. HOULTON, an account of which will appear in THE LANCET.

After some discussion, a communication on the atropa belladonna, from Mr. LEY, was read.

In this essay, Mr. LEY endeavoured to point out that belladonna was not of so deadly a nature as its name, and the dread entertained of it by the profession and the public would lead one to suppose, and he quotes several cases to show that a fatal result rarely attends its ingestion. He observes that its effects are rapid and constant, therefore, if understood, most highly valuable. The difficulty is in seeing and describing them so clearly that future observers shall recognise the same results from medicinal doses. For this purpose the variety of the observations recorded, and even the varieties of language in which the narratives are clothed, become useful information for future observers, to test and reject that which is least precise and perfect. In testing the medicinal influence of a medicine by which we seek to relieve pain, spasm, and irritability of system, and to procure sleep, its approximation to or secession from opium in its action on the system, will form a very good standard to judge of its effects, and tried by this test, Mr. Ley has found that the action of opium and belladonna is very similar. He has himself taken belladonna, and has given it frequently, in doses of from half a grain to a grain, and in describing its action, instead of saying that it diminishes sensation, irritability, and arterial action, in the first stage of its influence, he believes that it increases them all, and that the peculiar action of the remedy being exhausted, reaction takes place, and its effects, to wit, diminution of sensation, irritability, and arterial action follow. He observes, that soon after taking a grain of the extract, there is a peculiar taste in the mouth, and a diffused, novel sensation over the whole body, which excites the attention forcibly and unpleasantly. Saliva is secreted in diminished quantity. The nervous excitement becomes absolutely painful, with restlessness, and with the attempt to move giddiness, with an affection of the cerebrum, become evident. There is difficulty in swallowing, and the voice becomes hoarse; it is as if the action of the parts were impeded by great loss of the lubricating moisture of the mucous membranes. The sight is affected and indistinct, and the eye has the same sensation (perhaps of coldness) that is felt over the body. The lids become dry, and the general sensation is similar to that experienced after long watching. Pain in the bowels may occur, and perhaps an evacuation may take place, but neither purging nor diuresis is caused by it. Sore-throat and redness of the skin, resembling scarlatina, is sometimes produced, and inordinate menstrual discharge may occur suddenly in females. The attention is so entirely absorbed by the peculiar sensation, and the irritability of system, that no pursuit can be followed; the eye can see, but is indisposed to maintain attention to the object, and the ear has sensation, and hears peculiar noises. The disposition to withdraw from all the excitements of passing influences becomes active, and the retirement-like weariness brings repose. In this stage of excitement Mr. Ley observes, it is not difficult to trace an increased arterial action approaching inflammation; and this being the first and immediate action of the remedy, we ought to reckon the rapid subsidence or evanescence of these effects among the virtues of the medicine. In Dr. Pereira's opinion belladonna is not fitted for plethoric constitutions, nor for febrile and acute inflammatory cases, in which Mr. Ley coincides, but he thinks it may be rendered so by combination with other medicines, or by preceding its use by blood-letting. It has been his habit, he says, to produce the excitement, and to allow the reaction to go on undisturbed for a day or two. He expects more benefit in the second or third day of inaction than from the immediate effect of the drug. In this way relief is experienced in scrofulous ophthalmia, in toothach &c., when the state of excitement has passed away. A decided astringent effect is produced by the exhibition of belladonna in some chronic discharges from the

mucous membranes, and the secretion in ulceration of the trachea is diminished, and the cough relieved by it; various vesicular eruptions on the skin are also removed by it, and when the contents of the vesicle have become semi-purulent, the true skin ulcerated, the ulcer being deep and devoid of healthy granulations, the edges being under the influence of the creeping vesicle, a single grain of the extract of belladonna will annihilate the eruption, and the ulcer will immediately assume a healthy appearance. This influence is well exemplified by that affection of the finger where the cuticle is raised by a semi-purulent fluid round the nail. The cuticle being removed the circle will still be enlarged by the separation of fresh cuticle, and the denuded surface pours out a copious discharge. The effect of one dose of belladonna is to dry the denuded surface, so that the disease no longer exists, and this is effected with so much rapidity as almost to seem like magic.

Mr. Ley quotes two cases from Mr. Liston's practice in University College Hospital, in one of which minute doses of belladonna cured an attack of erysipelas in two or three days; and in the other, a case of small ulcerations on the legs, aggravated by a scald, and attended by much inflammation and fever, after the fever was subdued the belladonna also speedily effected a cure. In conclusion, Mr. Ley adverted to the difference presented by the extracts as met with in the shops, and stated that he had found a scaly black, tobacco-smelling extract, most efficacious for external application. This, he considers, may be owing to the mixture of the fruit with the leaves, or to the adulteration of the extract with some other drugs, and in that case he thought it would be advisable to try the adulterated drug itself.

NEWS OF THE WEEK.

The last report of the National Vaccine Establishment states that the metropolitan mortality by small-pox during the last year (which has been remarkable for the severity of its epidemic maladies), has been estimated as low as 438, whereas by measles alone 1400 lives have been lost. The charges of lymph distributed during the last twelve months were 158,494, a number exceeding that of the former year by 31,000, and from which 85,550 cases had been reported as vaccinated. Staff-Surgeon Hall, at St. Vincent's, West Indies, has succeeded in propagating the true vaccine vesicle from lymph supplied by the National Vaccine Establishment in the islands St. Vincent, Trinidad, Tobago, St. Lucia, Dominica, Antigua, and St. Kitt's. The board has also sent a large supply of vaccine lymph to Hong Kong, from the use of which it anticipates the extinction of the small-pox in the Chinese empire, long so dreadfully ravaged by that disease.

William B. Carpenter, M.D., F.R.S., was, on Monday last, elected Fullerian Professor of Physiology to the Royal Institution of Great Britain.

THE council of the Royal College of Surgeons have elected Sir Benjamin Brodie, President, and Mr. Samuel Cooper and Mr. Lawrence, vice-presidents for the ensuing year.

APOTHECARIES' HALL, LONDON.

NAMES of gentlemen who obtained certificates of qualification to practise as apothecaries on Thursday, July 11, 1844:—William Davy, Barnstaple, Devon; Christopher Rogerson, Blackburn, Lancashire; John Henry Wise, Banbury, Oxon; Stephen Shute Alford, Taunton, Somerset; Joseph Stevens, Woolverton, Hants; Edward Kent Parson.

MORTALITY TABLE.

THE deaths in the metropolis for the week ending July 13th, were 831. The weekly average of the last five years is 946, of the last five winters 1009.

Diseases of the lungs	221
Epidemic and contagious diseases	219
Diseases of the nervous system	138
Dropsy, cancer, and diseases of uncertain seat	78
Diseases of the stomach and other digestive organs	74
Old age	46
Diseases of the heart and blood vessels	24
Violence, privation, &c.	11
Rheumatism, diseases of the bones, &c.	10
Childbirth and diseases of uterus	5
Diseases of the kidneys, &c.	4
Cellular diseases of the skin	0
Causes not specified	0

Total..... 831

CORRESPONDENTS.

To the Editor.—Sir: THE LANCET for July 6 (p. 487), contains an account, drawn up with all the formality which is usually characteristic of an important communication to the Medico-Chirurgical Society, of a new speculum uteri, devised by Mr. P. Smith. Will you, like a "best-possible public instructor," kindly assure the "inventor" that his idea is more than twelvemonths old, and that if precisely such an instrument has not already been used in Paris, the renowned Coxeter, of Grafton-street, University College, has made, by special direction, and sold just such a speculum, for use in University College Hospital a year or two back, and that it has there been employed over and over again, but not with results sufficiently flattering to justify the eulogiums that have been passed on the subject by my friend Smith. I have the honour to be, Sir, your very obedient servant,
OS UTERI.

The case forwarded by Dr. Barlow a month ago, has been accepted, and will be duly inserted.

Medicus will perceive by our leading article of this week that we had already determined to take the course he suggests in his letter. We are much obliged to him for his remarks.

A Constant Reader, &c., cannot avoid passing the M.B. examination, although in practice prior to 1840. His being a practitioner of five years standing will, however, free him from the degree in arts and matriculation examination.

We have been requested by Dr. Ranking, of Bury St. Edmonds, to state that Dr. Cowan, acknowledging the priority of Dr. R., has courteously given up his intention of publishing a translation of M. Lugol's recent work.

Dr. Tyler Smith's paper on puerperal convulsion will be inserted in an early number.

The ably-written letter of *Multorum Vox* should have had a place in our pages, but that we have been compelled to put aside a large number of communications of a critical character from want of room to print them, to which we equally award the merit of soundness of views and accomplished diction.

There is no probability that the change will take place to which *W. L.* recently referred.

A Student.—The lectures in question will be commenced in a few weeks.

Civis, Birmingham.—The proper foundation for subsequent proceedings in such a case is a coroner's inquest. If there was one held in the case described by our correspondent, what was the verdict?

Santonine may be procured at Mr. Bullock's, Conduit-street.

A Constant Reader.—The following is a list of most of the principal works that have been published on puerperal insanity:—"Vehr Diss. de Melancholia ex Utero in Puerpera Observata et Curata. Franckfort: 1705." "Bebger. Diss. de Puerperarum Mania et Melancholia. Gottingen: 1745." "Quelmally. Prog. de Delirio ex Lactu. Leiptzig: 1754." "Rascher. Diss. de Mania et Melancholia Puerperarum. Erfurt: 1794." "Esquirol. Des Maladies Mentales. Paris." In one volume. "Jockert. Diss. de Mania Puerperali. Berlin: 1821." "Coosterloo. Diss. de Mania Puerperali. Groningeu: 1822." This form of insanity is also described in nearly all works on insanity.

Communications have been received from *Dr. Hall Davis*, *Mr. J. I. Walker*, *Medicus*, *A Student*, *Juvenis Studens*, *Mr. Spencer Thomas Smith*, *Dr. William Henderson*, *Mr. Ross*, *Dr. Chamber*, *Mr. Tripe*, *A Looker-on*, *Dr. Price*, and Δ .

The communications of the following gentlemen have been accepted, and will be published in our ensuing numbers:—*Dr. Kelso*, *Mr. Chance*, *Dr. Allnatt*, *Dr. Bullen*, *Mr. A. Juke*, *Dr. Inman*, *Mr. O'Shea*, *Dr. Powell*, *Dr. Barlow*, *Mr. Roberts*, *Dr. Campbell*, *Mr. Colt*, *Dr. Tyler Smith*, *Dr. Robertson*, *Mr. Hancock*, *Mr. Gay*, *Mr. Taylor*, *Mr. Whiteman*, *Mr. Campbell de Morgan*, *Mr. Wardleworth*, *Mr. Ross*, *Mr. Reedale*, and *Dr. Chambers*.